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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000162

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE PASS USAID FOR ANE/KUNDER AND ANE-SPO BRADY  
STATE ALSO PASS USAID FOR ANE/KENNEDY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [OSCI](#) [VM](#) [AFLU](#) [HIV](#) [AIDS](#)

SUBJECT: VIETNAM: AMBASSADOR'S CALL ON MINISTER OF HEALTH,  
MADAME TRAN THI TRUNG CHIEN

1. Summary: In a January 14 meeting with the Ambassador, Minister of Health Tran Thi Trung Chien thanked the United States for additional Emergency Plan funding for HIV/AIDS interventions in Vietnam. She responded to the Ambassador's push for more efficient and effective HIV/AIDS cooperation both across ministries and between the U.S. agencies and the GVN by pointing to the inter-ministerial Coordinating Committee that was formed under the oversight of the Ministry of Health (MOH) to guide the implementation of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (Emergency Plan). Minister Chien also requested an official letter from the U.S. Government specifying the mechanism of disbursement and priorities for Emergency Plan funds to facilitate communication and action in this area. She emphasized that MOH was the focal point of all HIV/AIDS activities in Vietnam. In the context of renewed concern about Avian Influenza, Chien appealed for USG support for equipment and training. She assigned members of her staff who were present as point of contact for key follow-up actions discussed in the meeting, including resolving the delays on a dioxin-birth defect study. End Summary.

HIV/AIDS

2. The Ambassador affirmed USG commitment to assist Vietnam's efforts to combat HIV/AIDS. In addition to the key areas of HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment of the Emergency Plan, he highlighted the critical importance of eliminating stigma and discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment and schooling. Two pressing issues raised by the Ambassador were program coordination and the supply of antiretroviral (ARV) drugs for treatment.

3. When asked about the GVN's HIV/AIDS efforts across other agencies and ministries and about an opportunity for the Ambassador to meet with and brief the National Standing Committee for HIV/AIDS, Prostitution and Drug Prevention (Note: This National Standing Committee is Chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem and is responsible for coordinating HIV/AIDS policy across agencies and ministries. End Note.), Minister Chien stated repeatedly that MOH was the focal point of all GVN HIV/AIDS activities and that all contact on in this area should be communicated through MOH's International Cooperation Department. This, she said, would save the USG the time of contacting multiple ministries and members and would allow MOH to be fully informed of all activities and requests. While Minister Chien was unresponsive to the Ambassador's urging for a meeting with the National Standing Committee, she agreed to share a list of the members of the National Coordinating Committee for the Emergency Plan and to consider the possibility of the Ambassador meeting personally with its members. (Note: The National Coordinating Committee was formed by an MOH Decision in November 2004. It is chaired by Madame Chien and its express purpose is to guide the implementation of the Emergency Plan. End Note.)

4. According to Minister Chien, the primary difficulty for MOH in efficiently facilitating Emergency Plan activities and coordination was that the GVN had not received official notification from the USG on the specific amount of the award, its mechanism for disbursement and the priorities for use of the funds. Citing the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM), Minister Chien stated that MOH had received clear GFATM objectives and guidelines for specific activities with the amount of funding for each year and a timeline for each activity so that MOH could prepare and respond appropriately. She requested an official letter with such specifics on the Emergency Plan to be sent to MOH so that it could be reviewed by the GVN. The Ambassador acknowledged the need for greater clarity for Emergency Plan activities and funding, noting Vietnam's late selection as the fifteenth focus country. He shared the news that Ambassador Tobias has just approved the USG's five-year HIV/AIDS strategy for Vietnam and the proposed plan of activities for the coming year. This news would be communicated quickly through official channels to the GVN, he promised.

5. The Ambassador noted that under USG policy, ARV drugs

paid for by the USG must be approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). He expressed hope for MOH assistance in bringing approved ARVs into Vietnam to facilitate treatment. The Ambassador also noted that the ideal situation was for locally produced drugs to get FDA approval, but added that neither of the two companies in Vietnam producing ARVs had applied for FDA approval. He offered the assistance of the Embassy's Health Attach to assist these companies through the application process. Minister Chien noted that she had visited a German supported company in Ho Chi Minh City with an ARV drug formula meeting WHO guidelines and significantly cheaper than market price. She assigned the Director of MOH's Therapy Department to work with the USG on the issue of ARV supply.

#### Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

16. Asked about other MOH priorities beyond HIV/AIDS, Minister Chien described the urgent need to improve Vietnam's laboratory infrastructure and human capacity to test for and prevent an Avian Influenza pandemic. She requested support for emergency medical equipment for the country's three regional laboratories and training of experts in laboratory skills. Minister Chien agreed to prepare a written proposal that MOH would submit to the Embassy for consideration.

#### Disability and Rehabilitation

17. The Ambassador and Minister Chien shared their concerns over the issue of disabilities. The Ambassador reaffirmed the long history and successes the United States and Vietnam have shared working together on this issue. He noted the USG's continued commitment to support Vietnam in this area, and informed the Minister that the Embassy intends to review past and current efforts in order to provide the best possible assistance.

#### Agent Orange

18. One final concern raised by the Ambassador was cooperation on measuring the effects of Agent Orange. The two main areas in question are environmental effects and birth defects. The Ambassador noted his concern that questions over funding mechanism had delayed a proposed birth defect study and warned that further delays may mean loss of funding. He urged Minister Chien to help resolve the problem before the Tet (Lunar New Year) holiday in February so that the United States and Vietnam can work together on this sensitive but important issue. Chien agreed to do so, and designated Dr. Truong Viet Dzung, Director of the Department on Science and Training, to take the lead on the issue.

19. Comment: Minister Chien described key priorities of MOH that are clearly areas of mutual interest for the USG. She pointed to the good cooperation MOH has with the Embassy Health Attache, but did not answer the Ambassador's request for establishing direct working relationships between the USG HIV/AIDS team and other relevant ministries outside of MOH. While Chien ended the meeting on a positive note, agreeing to share a list of the members of the interagency Coordinating Committee for the Emergency Plan and implying that a meeting of the Ambassador and that Committee was possible, she was insistent on keeping communications formal and channeling all USG requests through MOH's International Cooperation Department. It was not clear if Chien's focus on the Coordinating Committee under MOH instead of the National Standing Committee under DPM Khiem was due to a miscommunication or if she was reluctant to facilitate direct USG contact with the National Standing Committee. End Comment.

MARINE